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U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE.

Appropriations for fighting and preventing fires in the national forests.

1920.

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APPROPRIATION FOR FIGHTING AND PREVENTING
FIRES IN THE NATIONAL FORESTS.

LETTER

FROM

THE SECRETARY OF THE TREASURY,

TRANSMITTING

COPY OF COMMUNICATION FROM THE ACTING SECRETARY OF
AGRICULTURE SUBMITTING SUPPLEMENTAL ESTIMATE OF
APPROPRIATION REQUIRED BY THAT DEPARTMENT FOR FIGHT-
ING AND PREVENTING FIRES IN THE NATIONAL FORESTS, FIS-
CAL YEAR 1920.

SEPTEMBER 2, 1919.—Referred to the Committee on Appropriations and ordered to
be printed.

TREASURY DEPARTMENT,
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY,
Washington, September 2, 1919.

SIR: I have the honor to transmit herewith, for the consideration
of Congress, copy of a communication from the Acting Secretary of
Agriculture of the 29th ultimo, submitting a supplemental estimate
of appropriation in the sum of \$2,500,000, required by the Depart-
ment of Agriculture for fighting and preventing fires in the national
forests. fiscal year 1920.

The necessity for the appropriation and the reasons for the sub-
mission of the estimate at this time are fully set forth in the letter of
the Acting Secretary of Agriculture herewith.

Respectfully,

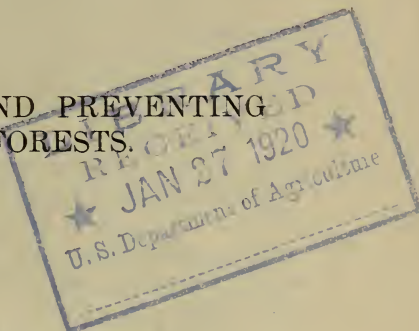
CARTER GLASS, *Secretary.*

The SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES.

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE,
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY,
Washington, August 29, 1919.

The honorable the SECRETARY OF THE TREASURY.

SIR: I have the honor to submit herewith an estimate of an addi-
tional appropriation required by this department to meet the ex-



traordinary emergency caused by destructive fires on the national forests. For this item the following wording is suggested:

That there is hereby appropriated out of any money in the Treasury of the United States not otherwise appropriated, to enable the Secretary of Agriculture to meet the existing emergency and to pay any expenses heretofore incurred or which may hereafter be incurred in fighting and preventing forest fires endangering the national forests during the fiscal year ending June 30, 1920, \$2,500,000.

The current agricultural appropriation act carries an appropriation of \$150,000 for fighting and preventing forest fires and for other unforeseen emergencies. On account of the unfavorable climatic conditions, extensive forest fires have occurred and are still burning, and the appropriation in the present act was entirely inadequate to meet the situation. In fact, it was completely exhausted shortly after July 1.

Severe drought conditions have prevailed in the Northwest for three consecutive years. It is a more severe season than the two previous because of its early beginning and the almost complete lack of rains which almost invariably come during August. In addition, there was a very light snowfall during the last two winters.

This year the fire season began about June 20 and extended over northern and central Idaho, western Montana, and the forest region east of the mountains. The inflammable condition of the forests is due not only to the effect of the long-continued drought of this year but also to the cumulative effect of the three dry seasons and two light winters. The ground cover and the soil to a considerable depth, even in the heavy forests, are thoroughly dried out. In addition, because of the dryness, the green needles of the coniferous trees are in an exceptionally inflammable condition. Fires which ordinarily would creep along the ground quickly become crown fires and spread with great rapidity. No similar condition has occurred since 30 years ago. Then there was a series of dry years, culminating in the great drought and forest fires of 1889.

Most of the large fires have been set by lightning. Those which can not be extinguished quickly are those which originate in the less accessible portions of the forest and which it may take several days to reach with a crew of men. During a season like the present, a fire which burns a few hours becomes a conflagration.

The work of fire fighting never has been so well organized as during the present season. The overhead organization has operated with great efficiency. This applies to the preventive organization of lookoutmen, smoke chasers, and guards. It applies also to the recruiting of labor for fighting fires, to the organization of the camps, the equipping and supplying of fire fighters, etc. A most careful scrutiny of the expenditures has been and is still maintained. While in the aggregate these have been, and will continue to be, large, incalculable losses would have resulted if they had not been incurred.

The situation is still exceedingly critical, more so than at any time during the season. Scattered rains occurred about the end of July, but they were localized and their effect was destroyed in a few days. It is impossible at this time, therefore, to curtail the present rate of expenditure. If the fires should be allowed to burn, there would soon be a conflagration that would sweep the western country with great loss.

While there have been some serious fires in Oregon and Washington, the situation in these States up to this time has not been as difficult as in the inland empire. If the present drought continues, however, great difficulties may be expected both in eastern Oregon and Washington and on the west slope. California also has been very dry, there having been a light snowfall last winter. Large fires already are breaking out in a number of forests throughout the State. In portions of Wyoming and Colorado there has been a very dry period and serious fires. Bad fires are raging on the Bighorn National Forest and the situation is serious.

It has been necessary greatly to exceed the appropriation of \$150,000. It is estimated that the total expenditures and liabilities to August 20 amounted to \$1,548,872. The expenditures from August 20 to 31 will probably aggregate \$491,570, or at the rate of approximately \$50,000 a day. It is to be hoped that the fall rains will occur by September 12. At the rate of \$50,000 per day, the expenditures for the period from September 1 to 12 will be approximately \$600,000, making a total of \$2,640,442. Deducting from this amount the \$150,000 carried in the current agricultural appropriation act, the expenditures will exceed by \$2,490,442 the present appropriation. These figures, of course, are only approximations, because it is uncertain just when the fall rains, which will probably relieve the existing serious situation, will occur.

The funds with which to meet obligations in excess of the \$150,000 appropriation have been drawn from general expenses, Forest Service, or from funds provided for other purposes, as the law permits the incurring of a deficit for the protection of life and public property.

It will thus be seen that approximately \$2,500,000 is the minimum additional amount required to cover expenditures already made, existing liabilities, and estimated liabilities to be incurred. This sum should be provided immediately, so that the funds provided for the general expenses of the Forest Service, as well as for other specific objects, may be reimbursed by the amount of expenditures already made for fire-fighting purposes, thus making it possible to carry on the necessary and regular work of the Forest Service during the remainder of the fiscal year.

Respectfully,

C. F. MARVIN, *Acting Secretary.*

Approved:

WOODROW WILSON.

2 SEPTEMBER, 1919.

Supplemental estimates of appropriations required for the service of the fiscal year ending June 30, 1920, by the Department of Agriculture.

Fighting and preventing forest fires—

That there is hereby appropriated out of any money in the Treasury of the United States not otherwise appropriated, to enable the Secretary of Agriculture to meet the existing emergency and to pay any expenses heretofore incurred or which may hereafter be incurred in fighting and preventing forest fires endangering the national forests during the fiscal year ending June 30, 1920 (July 24, 1919, vol. 41, p. 251, sec. 1).....	\$2, 500, 000. 00
Amount appropriated for the current fiscal year ending June 30, 1919.....	150, 000. 00

